

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 00854 160957Z
ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6818
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AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 0854

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDEV PINT LE
SUBJ: LEBANON: THE ROCKY ROAD TO PEACE

1. INHERENT FRAGILITY OF LOCAL SITUATION ILLUSTRATED BY INCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED AT FURN ASH-SHEBBAK (CHRISTIAN SUBURB OF BEIRUT) AFTERNOON FEB. 15. THREE SYRIAN SOLDIERS IN CAR OR JEEP APPARENTLY HAD MINOR ROAD ACCIDENT. QUARREL ENSUED AND TWO OF SYRIANS WERE SHOT AND KILLED. THIRD WAS TAKEN TO LOCAL KATA'IB HEADQUARTERS BUT SUBSEQUENTLY RELEASED.

2. AT 2100 DANY CHAMOUN CALLED ME TO SAY SYRIANS WERE DEMANDING THAT CULPRITS BE TURNED OVER OR THEY WOULD SHELL ENTIRE QUARTER. HE SAID KILLING WAS CLEARLY WORK OF KATA'IB. HIS PNL FORCES HAD INSTRUCTIONS TO FACILITATE SYRIAN TASK OF ARRESTING CULPRITS, BUT KATA'IB NOT COOPERATING AND SYRIANS MERELY REITERATING THEIR THREAT. HE ASKED THAT WE INTERCEDE WITH THE SYRIANS TO PREVENT THEM FROM CARRYING OUT THEIR THREAT, OTHERWISE THERE WOULD BE A GENERAL WAR BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND SYRIANS. HE HAD MADE SIMILAR CALL TO PRESIDENT SARKIS.

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3. I EXPLAINED THAT (1) I HAD NO DIRECT CONTACT WITH SYRIANS HERE AND (2) IT WOULD BE VERY DIFFICULT FOR EMBASSY DAMASCUS TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT AT THAT TIME OF NIGHT. I PROMISED TO DO WHAT I COULD, HOWEVER, AND, AFTER CONSULTING WITH DCM LANE, CALLED FORMIN BOUTROS, WHO VISITING FRIENDS FOR THE EVENING. BOUTROS WENT INTO ORBIT AND SAID CHRISTIANS

WOULD HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN HAVING SYRIANS OR PROTECTING CRIMINALS IN THEIR MIDST. WHEN SYRIAN SOLDIERS WERE KILLED IN THIS FASHION, SYRIAN AUTHORITIES WERE GOING TO INSIST THAT SOMEONE BE TURNED OVER TO THEM FOR INVESTIGATION AND POSSIBLE PROSECUTION. IF COMMUNITY HAD THE GUILTY AND REFUSED TO GIVE THEM UP JUST BECAUSE THEY HAPPENED TO BE CARRYING A GUN, SYRIANS WOULD HOLD ENTIRE COMMUNITY RESPONSIBLE AND WOULD METE OUT PUNISHMENT TO IT.

4. HE HAD GOTTEN SYRIANS TO POSTPONE THEIR ULTIMATUM FOUR HOURS, BUT THAT WAS ALL HE COULD DO. IF CHRISTIANS WANTED PREVENT RETALIATION, THEY HAD BETTER HAND SOMEONE OVER TO THE SYRIANS. ALTERNATIVE WAS TO ASK SYRIANS TO GO HOME. GOL COULD NOT EXPECT THEM TO SUFFER CASUALTIES WITH NO RECOURSE. IF CHRISTIANS CONTINUED TO ACT THIS WAY HE WAS GOING TO QUIT. HE WAS NOT GOING TO BE GROUND DOWN BETWEEN TWO SIDES. HE WOULD GET OUT.

5. WE THEN AGREED THAT I WOULD CALL DANY AND ASK HIM TO CALL BOUTROS, WHICH I DID. DANY SAID HE WOULD.

6. AT 2300 BOUTROS CALLED TO SAY THAT DANY HAD NOT CALLED HIM BUT THAT HE HAD GOTTEN THE SYRIANS TO HOLD OFF UNTIL MORNING.

7. IT IS NOW 0930 ON THE 16TH. I HAVE JUST TALKED TO
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BOUTROS WHO IS UP AT BAABDA CONFERRING WITH SARKIS. HE SAYS THERE IS NOTHING NEW TO REPORT. I TOLD HIM WE UNDERSTAND SYRIANS HAD GIVEN A 0900 ULTIMATUM. BOUTROS SAID HE DID NOT KNOW WHAT THE LATEST HOUR WAS.

8. MEANTIME, FURN ASH-SHEBBAK, AIN AR-RUMMANEH AND SHIAH ARE BUTTONED UP TIGHT. WE ARE ALL WAITING FOR THE SHOE TO DROP. CAMILLE CHAMOUN TELLS ME HE AND PIERRE GEMAYEL ARE MEETING WITH SARKIS AT 1130 TO TRY TO RESOLVE PROBLEM.

9. WE HAVE JUST HEARD FROM NABIL NOUJAIM, AIDE TO DANY CHAMOUN, THAT SYRIAN DEADLINE HAS BEEN EXTENDED TO TWELVE NOON TODAY.
PARKER

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